

Florida Mountain Mining Sites,
Empire State Mine
Silver City Vicinity
Owyhee County
Idaho

HAER No. ID-31-D

HAER
ID
37-SILCI
ID-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING SURVEY
FLORIDA MOUNTAIN MINING SITES, EMPIRE STATE MINE

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Location: The Empire State Mine site is a small terraced area located on the western side of Florida Mountain at an elevation below two sites identified in this report as Stone Cabins No. 1 and No. 2.

Quad: USGS DeLamar Quadrangle, 7.5'
UTM coordinates: Zone 11, 520000 E, 4762850 N

Date of Construction: ca. 1880s

Present Owner: Kinross DeLamar Mine Company

Present Use: To be demolished

Significance: The site is associated with early mining activity (1880s to 1900s) in southwestern Idaho. It is also associated with William Dewey, a developer of mining sites on Florida Mountain.

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Date: June 1995

Site Layout and Description:

The Empire State Mine site is a small terraced area located on the western side of Florida Mountain at an elevation below two sites identified in this report as Stone Cabins No. 1 and No. 2. Below the Empire State is the Sullivan Mine site.

The features at the site consist of a collapsed adit, the remains of three collapsed buildings, and a collapsed wooden chute leading to a square ore bin, and a waste rock dump. Evidence of a stacked rock retaining wall can be seen at the base of the waste rock dump. In addition, the site contains a compressed area of ground on the north side of the collapsed buildings.

The entry to the collapsed adit is framed by wood timbers measuring 7x7 inches. These are partly buried by rock rubble covering the opening. It appears to enter the mountain at an incline rather than as a horizontal tunnel.

One of the collapsed buildings (Building A) lies directly between the adit and the chute and rock dump. A 1926 Sanborn fire insurance map indicates that this was a one-room residence with two additions. The remains indicate that it was a wood frame building sided with galvanized metal sheeting. The building had a south-facing gable and window. A wooden foundation with plank flooring is still evident. The building was fabricated with round nails. An old bed spring and a cot frame were observed in the area. Another window or door was located on the west facade. The building is estimated to have been about twelve feet by ten feet, the south wall being twelve feet. Low shrubs and young fir trees have begun reclaiming the site.

The galvanized metal wall, now lying atop the ruins of the building, has a window opening, through which can be seen the remains of a grizzly—or metal screen which functioned as a coarse sieve for the ore removed from the mine. Other wood debris, including floor boards, are visible through this opening.

To the north of Building A are the remains of two other structures. Wood planks are arranged to suggest that they were laid over a center beam or ridge pole. Thin pieces of metal, originally corrugated and now flattened, are affixed to some of the boards, indicating that this building was metal-roofed. Dimensions are estimated at 24 feet by 16 feet. Littered about the building are various pieces of metal, such as fragments of one-inch diameter pipe with an elbow fitting, metal hinges or brackets, nails, and cut scraps. The 1926 Sanborn map indicates that the larger, easternmost building functioned as a blacksmith shop, with two western additions used as a store room and office.

Adjacent to these building on the north side is a levelled area of compressed earth about eight feet square. Vegetation has not taken root on this compressed area. Additional fragments of metal were found here as well.

Directly downhill from Building A and facing northwest lies a waste rock dump upon which rest the remnants of a wooden ore chute. The chute is composed of boards 2 inches by 12 inches and braced underneath by boards and poles. The chute runs leads to a square, wood-framed ore bin. Four vertical 8-inch square timbers form the bin's corners, and are covered with 2-inch by 12-inch

horizontal boards. The dimensions of the bin are 85 inches by 84 inches. Wood beams brace the bin underneath, held together with 6-inch nails. Large 2-inch by 2-inch anchor bolts hold the chute together. Both the chute and ore bin appear to have been covered at one time.

The waste rock dump appears to be in two sections. The upper portion (on which the chute rested) is about 120 feet in length. Just below the remains of the chute is a slightly flattened area. Below that is another section of waste rock proceeding down-slope another 240 feet. Metal fragments, leather, and another bedspring are scattered across this area.

Historic Context:

The Empire State mine was located by William H. Dewey in October 1880 and subsequently opened and developed by him. The Carson District had not recovered from the depression in activity brought on by the 1875 collapse of the Bank of California. In 1877, Dewey had purchased the Black Jack mine with San Francisco investors as partners. This mine was producing paying ore. In the fall of 1879, the Black Jack shut down due to quarrels among the investors, which perhaps gave Dewey more time to prospect than he otherwise might have had.

The Empire State claim was 1,500 feet by 600 feet and located just west of the Black Jack somewhat lower in elevation on the mountain.¹ Dewey quickly mined about 35 tons of ore and expected them to mill between \$80 to \$100 per ton.² He built a "house" near the mine and prepared for a winter of hard work opening the claim, stoping, and hauling ore to the mill.³

In January 1881, twenty-five men were busy at the mine, running tunnels, winzes, a ventilating raise, and sending tons of ore to the mill. The Avalanche reporter, styled "Darby O'Quill," said that it all "goes to show that one Dewey is worth more to a mining camp than ten thousand like some we might mention."⁴

In its first year of production, the Empire State had 800 feet of drifts and tunnels. Access to the ore was via two adits, one "further down the hill" several hundred feet below the original tunnel. This was expected to cut the ledge at greater depth than the original tunnel into the mountain. Dewey made this tunnel larger than the first, "seven feet clear," and intended it to serve later as the permanent working tunnel for the mine.⁵ He hoped that the Empire State would eventually yield enough money to finance a long tunnel deep into the mountain and enable a more efficient mining and milling of the ore.

While working the Empire State, Dewey continued his interest in the Black Jack. The San Francisco investors lost control of it and the mine went for sale at a sheriff's auction. In late 1881 Dewey managed to re-acquire the property.⁶ He planned to superintend it together with the Empire State. At the time, Dewey was renting the Leonard mill in Silver City, expecting to mill at least 3,000 tons of ore from the two properties before Christmas of 1882.⁷ In November 1882, Dewey built a "substantial ore house" at the Empire State.⁸

The Black Jack vein was about 400 feet to the east of the Empire State, so Dewey began coordinating the development of both the mines. He pushed a new tunnel so that the two were connected underground, which made for more flexible use of all the minehead facilities. Black Jack ores could be stored in the new Empire State ore house, for example.⁹ Other connections provided improved ventilation for both properties. Dewey knew that streaks of ore existed in the vicinity that had been too low a grade to mine in the days when the San Francisco group had worked the mine. The new tunnel now made it profitable to extract this old chimney.¹⁰

By October, the work of further opening up the Black Jack ledge required the work of 25 men. Dewey built a substantial boarding and lodging house near the mine to accommodate these men. In preparation for winter work, Dewey laid in supplies.¹¹ In comparing the two ledges, observers said that the Black Jack was the larger, but that the smaller Empire State was the richer. Between the two, the mill crushings yielded the capital to continue the work.¹²

William H. Dewey's life took an unfortunate turn in August 1884, when he shot and killed a bartender in Silver City named Joe Koenig and was accused of murder. Work at the Black Jack and the Empire State was suspended or portions leased while he was in custody of the sheriff awaiting trial. Dewey eventually was acquitted in May 1885.¹³

A few months later, with leasors still working in the mine, Dewey began hauling dirt from the waste dump at the Empire State and running it over sluice boxes set up near the Chinese placer diggings just west of Silver City. This was considered a "new method" of working ore but was said to pay.¹⁴ Undoubtedly it paid less than what his leasors enjoyed when they hit a rich streak of decomposed ore in a chimney around the end of October 1885.¹⁵

William Dewey gradually recovered his financial equilibrium while his leasors at the Empire State made exceptionally rich strikes and did well until their lease expired around October 1888. With these and other discoveries at mines named the Trade Dollar and the Phillips and Sullivan, Silver City began to bustle again. The Avalanche editor said these mines were "hard to beat anywhere."¹⁶ The winter of 1888 promised to be a busy one. William Dewey, his wife and son Ed all went to live at the headworks of the Empire State mine in order to be "close to business."¹⁷

Dewey made several trips to the East in search of investors who would finance a significant expansion of the Empire State and Black Jack mines. He finally succeed in 1890, when the Idaho and Pittsburgh Mining and Milling Company was incorporated.¹⁸ The company's goal was to approach each of the two veins from a long cross-cut that would intersect first the Empire State and then the Black Jack--and, of course, any other hidden veins and chutes not yet discovered. The company planned to build a new mill at the mouth of this long tunnel. Such a mill would drastically cut down the expense of hauling ore to the custom mills around Silver City. Naturally, the mill would be of the latest design and use as many labor-saving devices and processes as possible. With these savings, lower grades of ore could be profitably mined while the search proceeded for bonanzas.

The company hired Ed Dewey as superintendent, who began by erecting buildings to house the workmen. He ordered massive amounts of timber and other supplies and hired men to start the tunnel, working them in three eight-hour shifts. As the rock was relatively soft, they made good headway in the beginning. For the expected encounter with harder rock, the company was prepared to use an air compressor to work Burleigh drills. The company desired clear title to its ground, so it proceeded to patent the Black Jack and Empire State ground.¹⁹

The cross-cut was to approach the veins at a lower depth than local miners had managed to attain heretofore. This tunnel opened the mountain at an elevation about 900 feet further down the mountain. The company would drive the tunnel until it struck the Empire State and then the Black Jack ledges. The tunnel would be high and wide enough for the economical evacuation of the ore from the tunnel. No hoisting would be needed.

In due course--by September of 1890--the new mill site was under construction not far from the mouth of the cross-cut tunnel, which was in the ravine above where Nigger (now Negro) Gulch joined Blue Gulch. The mill site need substantial grading, as it would begin as a ten-stamp mill, but planned to accommodate enlargement. The mill would be located below the tunnel and connected to it with a gravity tram. As the structure was nearing completion and the mechanics were ready to install the machinery, an observer noted 15 men laboring at the site.²⁰ With more men expected to be at the site once the mill was operating, the company built a "new and commodious" boarding house and a new office building.²¹ The plan was to have the mill completed and ready for action when the long cross-cut tunnel had reached the Black Jack and Empire State veins.

One other item needed attention, and that was the road between the mill and tunnel site and town. He built a good wagon road on the hillside up Blue Gulch to the tunnel on which to haul equipment and supplies.²²

These plans all were carried out. The Empire State mine was submerged as one part of the larger Idaho and Pittsburgh operations, losing its separate identity in a maze of interior tunnels, drifts, and levels. Dewey continued to develop claims, recruit eastern money, and finance additional mills on the sides of Florida Mountain claims. He organized the Trade Dollar Mining and Milling Company and the Florida Mountain Mining and Milling Company, each of these companies acquiring numerous claims. In 1899, all three companies, which were owned by investors with overlapping interests, consolidated to form the Trade Dollar Consolidated Mining and Milling Company. The Empire State was just one of forty properties owned by the company.

The Trade Dollar continued to operate through the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Dewey and his son had not been involved in the management of the mine after 1896, when the other investors bought Dewey out over a disagreement regarding his son, Ed. The company was a steady and profitable producer, supplying regular employment and a measure of economic stability to the town of Silver City. During this first decade, Owyhee County was the leading gold producer in the state of Idaho, thanks largely to the Trade Dollar, of which the Empire State was a part.

The Trade Dollar ceased its mining operations in 1910. The mines in its group became the property of other owners and groups, and were worked intermittently--and without great profit--in subsequent decades of the 20th Century.

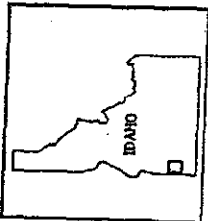
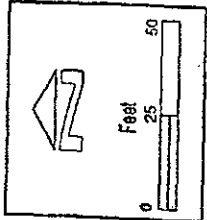
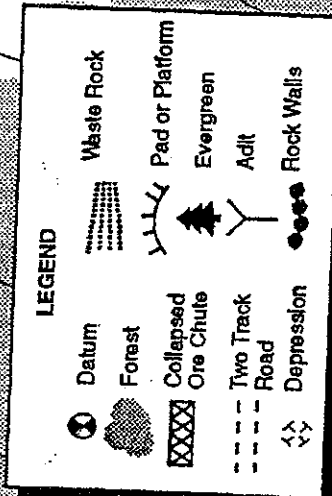
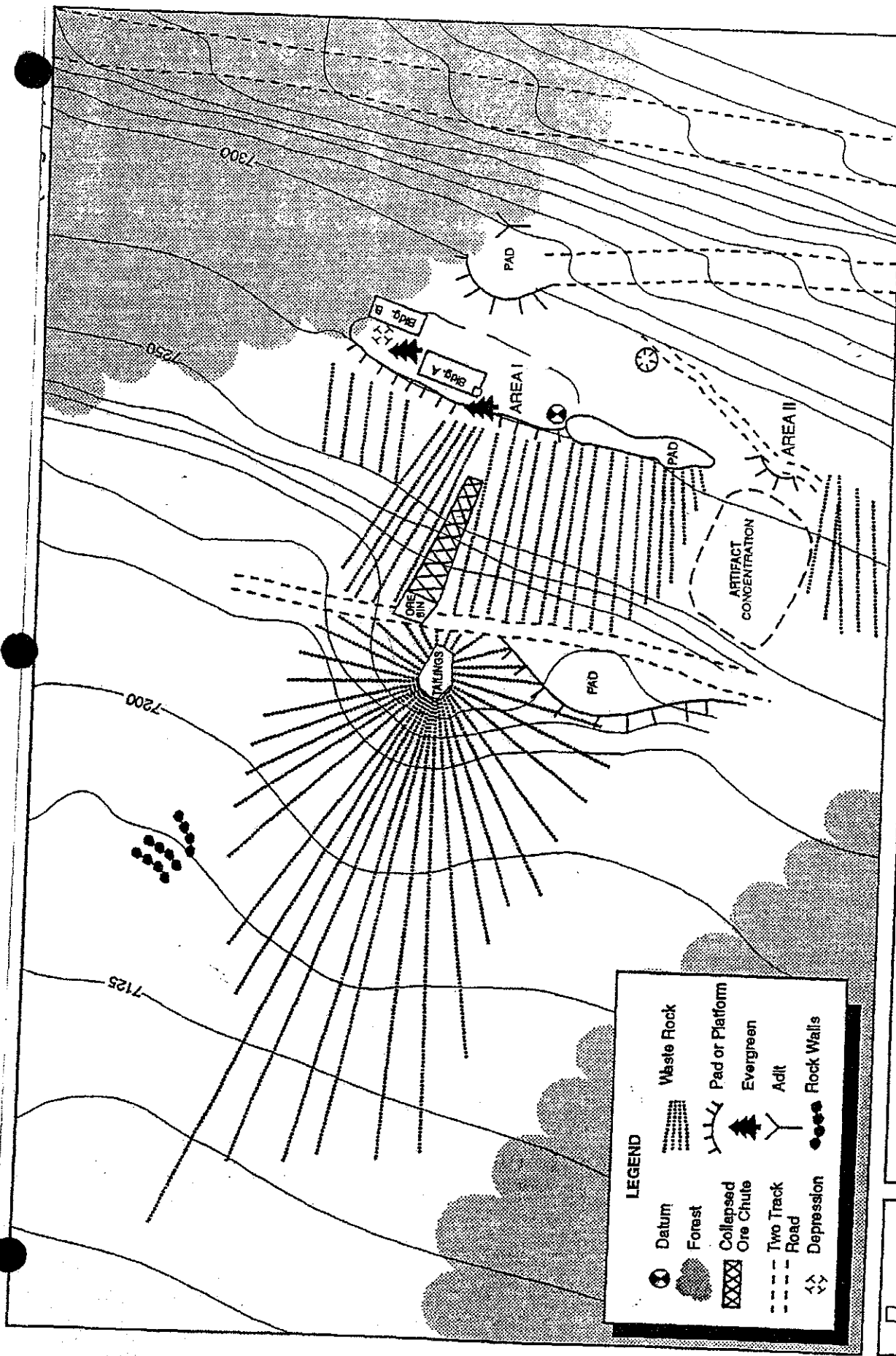
Among the scores of claims staked on Florida Mountain after 1875, the Empire State was one of the most important. A generous producer, the mine supplied entrepreneur William Dewey with sufficient profit to take the development of Florida Mountain beyond the "muscle capital" stage of development. After eastern capitalists had invested in efficient mills, the Empire State ledge continued to yield its treasure as one of the many interconnected lodes of ore inside the mountain.

The remains of the original buildings at the mine entrance do little justice to the importance of the Empire State. These were the early buildings used when Dewey first started working the mine. After it was connected to the Black Jack and then intercepted by the long cross-cut tunnels, its ores were sent straight to the mill and no longer were hoisted to the Empire State adit.

END NOTES

1. "Mining Claims Located," Idaho Avalanche, December 4, 1880, page 3.
2. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, October 30, 1880, page 3. See also "Index to Mining Claims," Owyhee County Assessor, Murphy, Idaho, Book 6, pages 206, 320, and 586.
3. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, November 20, 1880, page 3.
4. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, January 8, 1881, page 3.
5. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, September 10, 1881, page 3.
6. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, December 31, 1881, page 3.
7. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, July 22, 1882, page 3.
8. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, November 11, 1882, page 3. See also "Mining Notes" for December 9, 1882.
9. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, December 9, 1882, page 3.
10. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, March 3, 1883, page 3.
11. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, October 29, 1883, page 3.
12. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, October 27, 1883, page 3.
13. "Local Intelligence," Idaho Avalanche, May 16, 1885, page 3; and B.W. Johnson, "Dewey Remembers the Colonel," Owyhee Outpost #26, May 1995, page 31-32.
14. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, August 1, 1885, page 3.
15. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, October 31, 1885 page 3.
16. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, September 24, 1887, page 3. See also "The Mines," October 20, page 3.

17. "Brevities," Idaho Avalanche, December 15, 1888, page 3, and an item with no heading on page 3 of the January 5, 1889, issue.
18. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, February 15, 1890, page 3.
19. No heading, Idaho Avalanche, February 15, 1890, page 3.
20. See "From Old War Eagle," Caldwell Tribune, September 6, 1890, page 6; and "Local Intelligence," Idaho Avalanche, August 2, 1890, page 3.
21. "Local Intelligence," Idaho Avalanche, August 30, 1890, page 3.
22. "Local Intelligence," Idaho Avalanche, May 24, 1890, page 3.



EMPIRE STATE MINE